

The rescue of the human scale

Resgate da escala humana

Rescate a escala humana

Testimonial by Renata Falzoni

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Would it be an exaggeration to say that the biggest problems in our cities converge in the excessive use of cars?

No, it would not.

Structures for cars such as bridges, viaducts, tunnels and avenues are directly related to the degradation of public space, inaccessibility, the elitism on urban spaces, violence, poor quality of life, precarious health, inefficiency, insecurity, avoidable deaths and urban sprawl. All these problems are unavoidable in a city that relies on cars to move around.

These are expensive projects that shear off urban space and confine citizens to deteriorated and disconnected quadrants, once called neighborhoods.

The presence of car in cities, even if they were powered by thought, are always going to be unsustainable. Besides their heavy weight, they occupy too much space. For each car it is required four parking spaces, so even when parked, they always increase the cost of urban space, most of it along the curb, which should be for collective use.



Nowadays, more than 80% of public spaces are used for car circulation or parking.

Sustainable and accessible cities offer structures for free personal choice, prioritizing active modes as walking and cycling, combined with public transport. This system must be isolated from the inevitable congestion inherent in excessive car use. On-street parking is taxed, and the income goes to sustainable mobility structures. In contrast to the current situation, where the citizen (on foot or by bicycle) is a survivor in the traffic war, in a sustainable city the population occupies and takes care of the public space. The population regains its citizenship, and the car loses its majesty.

The punishment for those who insist on driving where they “can’t”.

In this disruptive journey of 20th century logic, which opened the red carpet to private motor vehicles and ruined cities around the world, the biggest challenge is how to escape the trap that has enshrined individualism over the collective?

The formula is restoring the human scale to the initial concept of each project, especially in urban planning projects. Are you going to the drawing board? Start with the people, the human being, and then, let the ideas come from there.

Public policies supported by good projects, based on academic research, are part of the solution; even so, what we still have today are outlandish, self-centered projects, and the most important thing, which would be the collective well-being, is ignored.

The architects themselves do not think from the human perspective, but as drivers in cars. In this way, urban operations continue to focus on road infrastructure and relegate parks, sidewalks, bike lanes, public transportation and social housing to wherever there is space left, if there is any. In general, the citizen needs appear as amorphous appendages, “so that the project looks good on paper”.

Even today, urban planners start their projects with the avenue, and not the by the sidewalk or a park.

Brazil as a whole suffers from this problem: we are in an alley, where the only way out will be found through a major socio-cultural transformation.

Mixed neighborhoods, with houses for all social classes, more shops, schools, hospitals, cultural centers (everything close by), connected by pedestrian and cycling routes, with priority over cars, crossing parks flanked by open rivers with an extensive green area. This must be the basis, the initial concept to design a city. Hence, the importance of drawing up and complying with sustainable master plans, focused on the collective interest.

Efficient public transport combined with intelligent logistics, in which the last 2 km (1.24 miles) are electric cargo bikes, to increase the efficiency of cargo distribution, saving public space, complements the formula.



In short, the solutions have been studied and are well known, but culturally the idea of the city based on the individualism of cars remains. A solution sold as freedom that, in reality, keeps us in a prison, as a key point of social inequality.

Therefore, more than ever, it is essential for an urban planner, before designing, to experience what it is like to be a citizen on foot, exposed to the sun while waiting for a bus on a narrow sidewalk without a bench with a backrest. Let this architect push a stroller or a wheelchair on the way to school or a hospital along non-existent or uneven sidewalks and cross the avenue on a footbridge accessed by stairs. At night, let this citizen walk along a deserted sidewalk, along a condominium with high walls, no view, no lighting... And so on.

There is no urban solution from a professional who does not see himself as a person in his project. In order to recover the human scale, we have to use our own energy in the so-called public space to understand and equate solutions for recovering the right to the city, citizenship and well-being.

Architects have to think humanly.

